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TAGS: KISL PREL PGOV PTER JO  
SUBJECT: AWQAF MINISTER WELCOMES DIALOGUE, BUT REJECTS  
EXTREMISM

REF: A. AMMAN 9391  
B. 04 AMMAN 9152

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (U) Summary. Jordan's new Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Fattah Salah told Ambassador about his plans to promote the "Amman Message" - a statement issued in November 2004 promoting moderate Islam and coexistence - and to combat vigorously extremist takfiri ideology. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Salah told Ambassador in a December 7 meeting that his ministry is drawing up a comprehensive strategy, based on the principles of the "Amman Message" (ref B), to promote moderation and tolerance in Jordan. The plan calls for increased contact between the ministry and imams, including periodic meetings to address concerns over sermon content. These meetings will give an opportunity for the imams to hear examples of positive sermons that stay "on message". The ministry will publish a book that includes an assortment of "good sermons", and a biweekly pamphlet - that includes "suggestions" for sermon topics - will be made available for imams to reference prior to Friday prayers. Salah further hopes to organize training programs for imams both in Jordan and outside the country.

¶3. (C) Salah continued that his ministry will encourage dialogue in the Shari'a colleges and amongst imams in Jordan. He plans to allow discussion of dissenting opinions, rather than forcing imams to bury their personal views, in the belief that rationality will win over extremism in such an environment. Though the imams will have freedom to discuss their views, they will be responsible for their remarks, Salah stressed. Those that reject the guidance and principles of the "Amman Message" and espouse extremism or condone terrorism will "be hit with an iron fist". Salah clarified his understanding of the difference between Salafists and Takfiris, saying that Salafists, while conservative, are mainstream. Takfiris, on the other hand, are extremist "half-wits". Salah said that the challenge for his ministry is to remain close to the Salafists, in order to keep them from becoming Takfiris. He lauded U.S. assistance in the form of International Visitor programs, citing the experience of some Salafists that went to the U.S. and came back with a more moderate view.

¶4. (C) Comment. Salah's strategy largely echoes the remarks of the King (ref A), and represents a shift in the ministry's tactics to deal with takfiri extremism. (Salah's predecessor was sacked because of the palace's perception that he was overly sympathetic to extremists.) While committing to uphold human rights, the King has emphasized that Jordan cannot afford to be soft on extremist ideology. While those who support terrorism and extremism through rhetoric will not be jailed, they will be heavily fined. Salah is determined to take an equally hard line. In an Associated Press article published December 7, Salah was quoted as saying, "We will

not tolerate anybody to declare himself a religious figure, issue fatwas (religious edicts) and pronounce others as infidels. Violators will be referred to justice." End Comment.

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